

Iceland Gull Record Number: 93-01  
2 Jan 1993 Classification: NA  
Rathbun Reservoir, Appanoose Co., IA  
\*Cummins  
IBL 63:49, 64:69

DOCUMENTATION

Raymond L. Cummins

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 63:49

Records Committee: IBL 64:69

VOTE: 5 A-D, 2 NA

A-D, Convincing description of coloration, size, and body shape.

NA, Although this bird could have been an Iceland Gull, the description leans more toward a small Glaucous. Size perception is difficult when other gulls are not in close proximity. It would have helped to have a Herring close by for comparison. The bill coloration sounds more like first-winter Glaucous than first-winter Iceland. A "typical" Iceland should show a nearly black bill with a bit of lighter color to the base. A bird with this bill color could possibly be a second-winter Iceland, but I think we need more details on the body and particularly the tail to determine this. Even though this bird had a primary projection beyond the tail, I don't believe it extended far enough to rule out Glaucous. The rounded head and thinner bill sound good for Iceland, but structural perceptions which may vary in individual birds and are dependent upon feather arrangements are not sufficient for extra-limital records of a difficult identification.

NA, The identification rests entirely on the size of the bird, the head shape, and bill size as seen at 150 yards. I don't believe the distinction can be made at this distance, especially with no other gulls for comparison. Large male Icelands and small female Glaucous gulls can be nearly the same size. The black tipped bill is very characteristic of Glaucous, more variable in first-winter Iceland. Many Icelands have a pale brown distal tail band. The tan toward the base of the tail is a better fit with Glaucous. A 3/4" primary extension, if that could be evaluated at 150 yards, fits Glaucous better.

REVOTE: 3 A-D, 4 NA

NA, NA's have some valid points. Determination of this gull rests mainly on size. It would have been helpful if observer had given some indication of how much bigger this gull was compared to the only bird present--crows. Coloration of bill is more typical of Glaucous, but there is so much variation in Iceland that I would hesitate to make a decision based on this characteristic alone. This is a close call--and NA's have raised doubts that I find difficult to disregard.

NA, I was going to vote A-D on this record until I recalled that I myself have misidentified 1st yr Glaucous/Iceland Gulls twice in Iowa. In both cases, I thought they were Glaucous. I think the two NA voters present good arguments for their conclusion.

A-D, I agree with the first NA that size perception is difficult without direct comparison, but Crows were present. Crows are the same size as Ring-billed Gulls. This gull was noticeably bigger than the Crows, but not obviously bigger as would be the case for a small Glaucous Gull. The bill was not large with respect to the head. Glaucous would have a long thick bill with a gonys. In 45 min of viewing this gull sitting, walking, and flying I never once thought the bill to be thick as in Glaucous gulls. The head pattern did not always appear rounded, but in the 45 min. it looked rounded most of the times I checked this ID mark. The bill color alone is more characteristic of Glaucous than Iceland, but is within the variability of Iceland Gulls and is the expected color in the nominate race. Coloration seems to fit either species. In summary, overall size and bill size and shape rule out Glaucous and leave only first-winter Iceland Gull as a possibility.

NA, My previous analysis and that of other NA voter suggest that Glaucous Gull more likely.

A-D, Why does size perception on this record have to be limited to "other" gulls not being nearby. Cummins mentioned that the bird was larger than nearby crows and that compared to them it was not big enough to be a Glaucous. As for the bill color, Kaufman, Advanced Birding, 1990, pg.

118-119 say's that Kumlein's Icelands with sharply contrasting pink and black bills that appear to be first-year birds are likely to be second-winter birds that have yet to attain their gray mantles. I say that the identification did not rest entirely on the size of the bird, the head shape and the bill size. Coloration is described quite well as tannish white, white primaries and secondaries, whiter than the body. The head, back, belly and wing coverts also were tannish white with tan speckling. Tail color was also hard to see that it was different from the overall body color. This sure sounds more like an Iceland than a Glaucous or Thayers.

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF  
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

93-01

Species: Iceland Gull (first-winter) Number: 1

Location: Lake Rathbun Dam Appanoose Co.

Observer: Ray Cummins 609 S. Main Street Centerville, IA. 52544

Others before/with/after: Mary Montgomery and Dot Cornett

Date: 01/02/93 Time Bird Seen: 9:45AM to 10:30AM

Habitant & circumstances: The Iceland Gull was sighted on the ice above the dam feeding on a dead Canada goose. It was very protective of the food source chasing Crows away.

Description: The gull caught my attention because it was all white no dark or black areas noticeable when I scoped it. The head appeared to have a rounded crown with a dark eye. The bill was thin with no obvious gonyx. The bill was black at the distal 1/4 and light colored from there to the base. The head, back, belly, and wing coverts were tanish white with some tan speckling on the wing coverts and back. The bird was bigger than the crows present. The primaries extended 3/4" beyond the tail and were whiter than the body. In flight wings showed white primaries and secondaries both on top and underneath. The covert area was tanish white like the body. The tail seemed to have more tan than the body this was more prominent toward the base and outside. The tail color difference was noticeable but very hard to see that it was different from the overall body color. The leg color appeared to be pinkish-gray, but this was more an impression at this distance. The knee was 1" or less below the breast.

Description of voice: N/H.

Similarly appearing species: Thayer's Gull was eliminated because there was no dark in the primaries, no dark secondary band, and bill was not all dark. A first-winter Glaucous would have the coloration but there is no way this gull's bill or body size was big enough to be a Glaucous Gull.

Distance (how measured): 150 yds estimate.

Optical equipment: Kowa 20 to 60X spotting scope and Swift 8.5 x 44 binoculars.

Light: Good light, but it was overcast.

Previous experience with species: seen the first-winter bird at Davenport last year.

Anyone have reservations?: no.

Books and references: NGS during sighting.

Time of field notes: during sighting Final typing: 8 days.

Signature: Raymond L. Cummins

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Date: 01-10-93